

Update: Review of the IUNS Private Sector Engagement Policy

To: IUNS Adhering and Affiliated Bodies; all potential ICN participants and others with interest in the corporate sponsorship of the 22nd International Congress of Nutrition, Tokyo, December 2022

From: Dr. Lynnette M Neufeld (President-Elect IUNS)

Dear Adhering and Affiliated Bodies, friends and colleagues of IUNS:

Over the past weeks, I have received correspondence from several of you – officially as IUNS President-Elect and unofficially from friends and colleagues – raising concerns about the private sector sponsorship of the 22nd International Congress of Nutrition (22nd ICN) to be held in Tokyo in December 2022. I am very grateful for you bringing these concerns to our attention, but I am also troubled.

I'm grateful for your communication because it highlighted important gaps in the transparency related to corporate sponsorship of the 22nd ICN and the extent to which the IUNS Private Sector Engagement Policy was being adhered to. An accompanying letter by Drs. Kato (Chair of the Organizing Committee), and Martinez (President IUNS) will address these concerns explicitly. They also note that an error was made in accepting sponsorship funds from a breastmilk substitute producer who is not fully compliant with the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (BMS). Scientific meetings must have, and comply with, private sector engagement policies that protect the integrity of the science, and the response from Drs. Kato and Martinez lays out how the IUNS Private Sector Engagement Policy is being followed by the 22nd ICN.

But some individuals also raised concerns that imply that the IUNS policy does not go far enough. Specifically regarding sponsorships from companies that produce foods not considered part of a healthy diet (whether their sole product or one among a variety of products in the portfolio of the company). In my involvement over the years in a variety of scientific meetings (as Board Member of ASN, Chair of the Micronutrient Forum, and now President-Elect of IUNS) I have heard varied and often strong opinions expressed with regards to this issue. Some believe there should be no corporate sponsorship of scientific meetings at all (regardless of the nature of the products they produce), others that sponsorships should be accepted only from producers of foods that are aligned with healthy diets, while others favour avoiding explicit exclusions as long as policies that protect the scientific integrity of the program are followed. What is clear, is that as a nutrition research community we do not speak with a common voice in this regard. Perhaps that is not surprising. Nutrition science, although we refer to it with those simple two words, addresses issues from basic biology through clinical care and health systems, food environments and systems, equity and social inclusion – and a myriad of topics between and beyond those. Perhaps this diversity of sub-discipline contributes to our differences of opinion.

Regardless of the opinion of each of us as individuals, the policy must be right for IUNS. IUNS is a membership association of over 80 national nutrition societies that themselves represent nutrition scientists in their respective countries (referred to as Adhering Bodies – details available [here](#)). It must be IUNS Adhering Bodies that review and take decisions related to the Private Sector Engagement Policy. As soon as I take office as President (at the 22nd ICN meeting in Tokyo) I will form a task force to address this. I look forward at the meeting in Tokyo to discussing terms of reference, timeline, and composition of that task force with those of you interested to do so.

I look forward to seeing you all in Tokyo

Lynnette  21/6/2022